

Jerry's Journal



January, February, and March are, personally, the most difficult months of the year to get through. The holidays are over, we have yet to reach the midpoint of winter, and there is a predominant absence of sunshine. Things just seem to be bland until the first signs of spring make an appearance. Generally, we prefer the light to the darkness. That is why so many people who are retired become snowbirds and choose to ride out the first 90 days of the new year in places such as Florida. We just tend to avoid those things which are lackluster and gloomy.

Sadness, loneliness, the realization that another year of one's life has passed, fear of what lies ahead, and a heaviness of the soul are all perceived as feelings, thoughts, and emotions which are negative and not something we want to pay attention to or dwell on. But these feelings, thoughts, and emotions have their positive sides. Simply put, they keep us in touch with those parts of our soul we are not normally attentive to. Our souls are deep and complex, and trying to hear what they are saying involves listening to them. Our souls tell us things we normally refuse to or do not want to hear.

Unfortunately, it seems that it is common to see sadness and heaviness of soul as a deficiency in our vibrancy, or as an unhealthy condition. This is both unfortunate and shortsighted. In medieval and renaissance times, being sad or melancholy was something one needed to pass through to come to a deeper understanding of life.

St. Thomas More, who wrote with deep insight on how we need to learn to listen more carefully to the impulses and needs of the soul, offers the following insight: *"Melancholy gives us valuable qualities we need to be fully human. It gives us gravitas, seriousness, when we are too light about our lives. It offers a degree of solemnness. It also ages us so that we mature properly and are more prepared to deal with the anxieties and traumas of life."*

In many cultures, and in all great religions of the world, periods of somberness are considered as a necessary path one must travel to become whole. Isn't this also part of the Paschal Mystery within Christianity? Jesus himself, when preparing to make the ultimate sacrifice of love, had to, painfully, accept that there was no path to Easter Sunday that did not involve the darkness of Good Friday.

So how might we look at sadness and the dark night of the soul in our lives? How might we deal with melancholy and her children (sadness, murkiness, despondency, regret, and fear?)

First off, it is important to see all that is listed in the above paragraph as something that falls within the range of normal in our lives. Heaviness of the soul is not necessarily an indication that there is something wrong inside of us. Rather, normally, it is our soul's way of signaling for our attention, to be heard, trying to ground us in some deeper way and trying, as St. Thomas More puts it, to age us appropriately. For this to happen,

however, we need to resist two opposite temptations, namely, to distract ourselves from the sadness, or to wallow in it. How do we do this? What are we to do with the heaviness of the soul? The best advice is to put that heaviness in a suitcase and carry it with you. Keep it close, but contained; make sure it remains available, but don't allow it to take control of you or your life.

This is just a way of wording, in a secular way, the challenge Jesus issues to those who seek to walk with Him. *"If you wish to be my disciple, take up your cross every day and follow Me."*

Fr. Jerry Slowinski

"Marc" My Words



I am often asked, "Why did Jesus need to be baptized?" The short answer is, "He didn't!" But that still begs the question, "Why did Jesus get baptized by John then?" I'm going to answer that with words from a Doctor of the Church, St. Ambrose. St. Ambrose said, "The Lord was baptized, not to be cleansed himself, but to cleanse the waters, so that those waters, cleansed by the flesh of Christ which knew no sin, might have the power of baptism."



Through the "Holy Water" of baptism we can see salvation history at work. In the first book of the bible, in the Book of Genesis, Chapter One, we read that a "mighty wind swept over the waters" of a formless earth. The very first creation event mentions water and a mighty wind, which we now realize to be the Holy Spirit, making water holy, that is, set apart by God. Next we see that through the great flood during the time of Noah, water was used to cleanse the earth, recreating it. The Israelites passed through the waters of the Red Sea, dry-shod, freed from slavery in Egypt. Jesus was baptized in the Jordan by John, the feast we celebrate today. Lastly, blood and water flowed from Jesus' side as he died upon the cross for us. God intended from the beginning of time that water should be a rich symbol and sacramental for us.

We humans are composed of about 60% water. Without water we cannot live. Without the waters of baptism we can't be cleansed of original sin and formally admitted into God's family. That is the power of baptism, the gateway to all the other sacraments.

There is a wonderful prayer that is a part of the Baptismal Rite called the *Blessing and Invocation over Baptismal Water*. It begins, "Father, you give us grace through sacramental signs, which tell us of the wonders of your unseen power...By the power of

the Spirit give to the water of this font the grace of your Son...May all who are buried with Christ in the death of baptism rise also with him to newness of life.”

We can see and experience the love and mercy of an unseen God through the signs and wonders of the sacraments we are given. We can experience this every time we come to Mass, go to the font, and bless ourselves with the holy water, making the sign of the cross. When we do this we experience God’s presence in and around us. More importantly we experience God’s...

Peace, Love, and Blessings,

Deacon Marc

BAPTISM OF THE LORD

